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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 001376

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC IV
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: POLITICAL PROCESS DRIFTING

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Well into the second month of Cote d'Ivoire's second year of transition to postponed elections, the political process continues to drift. President Gbagbo is essentially ignoring UN Security Council Resolution 1721 and defying the peace process, and the political opposition has been unsuccessful in mounting large-scale street protests against him. Prime Minister Banny has formed working groups on identification and military reform, but they are consultative, not decision-making bodies. He has also announced the imminent resumption of the identification process, a crucial step toward elections, but the leader of President Gbagbo's party came out against this move. Rebel leader Guillaume Soro restructured his armed forces in ways that will make it more difficult to integrate them with government armed forces. The military continues to play an ambiguous role. The Ivoirians seem to feel no sense of urgency, and the likelihood of getting to elections by next October seems increasingly remote. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Well into the second month after Cote d'Ivoire's second year of transition to postponed elections began, with the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1721, the political process continues to drift.

¶3. (C) President Gbagbo, after delivering two body blows to the peace process by taking control of both state-owned TV and radio and the state-owned newspaper and by reinstating to their former senior positions three of his cronies who were implicated in the toxic waste disaster, is now hanging back, presumably gauging the strength of public opposition to these moves. Notably, Gbagbo has not released his proposals for implementing UNSCR 1721, which he promised to do after two weeks of "consultations with the population" in early November. In essence, for the moment Gbagbo is essentially defying the peace process and ignoring the Resolution. Meanwhile, the political opposition attempted but failed to mount large-scale street demonstrations against Gbagbo's latest moves.

¶4. (C) Prime Minister Banny has returned to Yamoussoukro, where he told the Ambassador he prefers to remain for security reasons instead of in Abidjan. Banny did establish the two working groups called for by UNSCR 1721: on identification and on military reform, as he promised at the December 1 IWG. However, these are only consultative, not decision-making bodies. Banny has also promised to re-launch the identification process (registering the 3.5 - 4 million undocumented Ivoirians and foreigners -- a crucial step toward preparing for elections) on December 18. The last time Banny tried to launch the mobile courts -- audiences foraines -- to carry out the identification process, pro-Gbagbo militias blocked many of them from functioning and Gbagbo eventually halted the process by declaring that these

particular courts were empowered only to issue birth certificates, not certificates of nationality. Banny has now nearly completed setting up parallel courts to issue the nationality certificates. However, as soon as Banny announced the resumption of identification, Affi N'Guessan, the head of President Gbagbo's FPI (Ivoirian Popular Front) party, immediately came out against resuming identification without concomitantly resuming disarmament.

15. (C) The rebel FN (New Forces), who suspended their participation in disarmament in August to protest Gbagbo's blocking of the identification process, have not publicly reacted to Banny's announcement of its resumption. Dacouri Tabli, a senior FN official, indicated to us that the FN would prefer to go back to the previous procedure where one court could issue both birth and nationality certificates. In any case, last week FN Secretary General Guillaume Soro restructured the FAFN (Armed Forces of the New Forces) to more closely resemble the structure of the government FANCI (Armed Forces of Cote d'Ivoire), a move that is likely to make the integration of the two armies more difficult.

16. (C) The government security forces continue to play an ambiguous role. Earlier this month, FANCI Chief of Staff General Philippe Mangou seemed to be trying to play the role of mediator, meeting with Prime Minister Banny and with leaders of the political opposition. However, on December 12, the spokesman for the security forces accused an opposition politician of plotting a coup attempt.

17. (C) Comment. The Ivoirians seem to feel no sense of urgency, and the likelihood of getting to elections by next October seems increasingly remote. Indeed, the AU/ECOWAS progress report, which UNSCR 1721 calls for by February 1,

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may show little or no progress at all. It seems increasingly clear that Gbagbo is afraid of holding elections he cannot fully control, and he may be waiting for the French elections in the hope that the new French president will disengage from the Cote d'Ivoire crisis. The opposition, unable to mount large-scale protests against Gbagbo, also has no effective strategy for negotiating an end to this crisis and largely limits itself to feeble pleas to the international community to take a more aggressive stance in Cote d'Ivoire. End Comment.

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